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ABSTRACT

The culture of the southern United States is examined in the context of its effects on race relations and how it is portrayed in curriculum. Many of the southern racial tragedies of the past are still unresolved and this is reflected in schools as they teach about the South. Since schools are dependent on published materials to teach classes, and since there is wide variation in how these materials treat topics such as slavery, no common picture of southern culture is being given. For significant social change to occur, black and white students need a new curriculum free of distortions. The new South is fundamentally different from the old South in that there is a redistribution of economic and political resources. In some instances scholars of the American South are redefining southern culture to incorporate the experiences of blacks and other ethnic groups. This must be reflected in texts and other educational materials. More research is needed to investigate how culture can mitigate learning or serve as a vehicle for liberation. (VM)

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The New South as Curriculum: Implications for Understanding Southern Race Relations

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The New South as Curriculum: Implications for Understanding Southern Race Relations

The purpose of this paper is to examine how southern culture shapes the corpus of knowledge transmitted through the overt and null curricula thereby influencing race relations. Schubert (1986) describes the overt curriculum as consisting of all skills, concepts, principles, appreciations, and values that school officials overtly provide for students. Curriculum specialists are aware that within this overt context there exists information, attitudes, values, principles and concepts which are learned by what is not taught in the schools. Eisner (1979) refers to this as the null curriculum. For example, the absence of black achievers in a history text teaches that blacks did not make major contributions to our society and the international community in general.

The central theme throughout this paper is that the tragedies of the past are still unresolved. Schools, as the major social institution to impart knowledge, reflect this collective indecisiveness. It is inside this organization that education becomes a function of place. A place in the sense that lived experiences of people within a region give meaning to their political, economic, social, and religious orientations. Thus the three questions that will direct the focus of this paper are: What is southern culture? Is there a difference between the Old and New South? and How have the interpretations of past events affected school curriculum?

Southern Culture

The factors which shaped a distinctive South are: the relative absence of non-Anglo-Saxon white ethnics, fundamentalist Protestantism, and a propensity for violence manifested in the peculiar racial and economic institution of the slave plantation (Carter, 1981). As pressure was applied on the South to abandon slavery, white southerners began to see themselves as sharing a common culture, sharing the same values and goals. By 1840, southern historians shifted from a history that asserted the various southern states' peculiar contributions to America to a history that assserted the South's difference from the North as spiritually superior. (Franklin, 1960). Since history was a popular and influential form of literature at that time, southern historians legitimated prevailing social attitudes. Just as important, the South was economically dependent on a plantation economy, one that was based on the exploitation of blacks and the subjugation of women. Thus the plantation social system and economy supported existing class, race and gender relationships.

These relationships were complex and interrelated. One means to maintain social order was authority (Mandle, 1978). Authority resulted in laws and regulations governing behavior providing the plantation a high degree of autonomy and sovereignty according to Mandale. These laws and regulations made it possible for white southerners to exploit blacks by committing acts of violence and intimidation against black men and women. The class structure was maintained primarily by serving as a symbol for what poor whites could aspire to. And

finally, authority permitted white men the right to deny white women their right to be self-determined and instead placed them on a pedestal.

Southern culture shifted drastically after the Civil War. Though conditions did not change substantially for women and poor whites until the middle of the twentieth century, Reconstruction and its aftermath radically changed race relations. According to Donald (1981) many Southerners' old feelings of condescending benevolence toward blacks was replaced with absolute hatred. This hatred grew as white southerners were forced to accept a new social order, one that gave blacks limited but important political and economic opportunities. Because whites in the South were unwilling to accept changes, they manufactured the idea of a Lost Cause. Sellers wrote:

> Bitter with defeat and humiliation in the postwar years, Southerners sought emotional balm in the sentimental myth of the Lost Cause, a psuedo-tragedy which gave the South a false history, a false image of itself, and a mystical social ideal that Southerners had not really accepted even in the heyday of secession (p.vi).

Southern culture became the Lost Cause. Southern writers and scholars celebrated their "heroic" struggle against the invading "Yankees" with pageantries and monuments of battles won and lost. In literature, southern writers began to create psuedo-scientific documents perpetuating blacks as inherently lazy, sexually deviant, biologically inferior, and a general menance to the community (Frederickson, 1971). One of the best selling authors in the early twentieth century was Thomas Dixon.

In The Leopard's Spots, Dixon described how the Civil War and Reconstruction turned blacks from

> chattel to be bought and sold into a possible beast to be feared and guarded ..... a menace throwing the blight of its shadow over future generations, a vertiable Black Death for the land and its people (pp.5, 33.)

In referencing women, southern mythos denied women of both races sexual self-determination (Gwin, 1985). Fishburn(1982), argued

> Whereas the lady was deprived of her sexuality, the black woman was identified with hers. White women were characterzied by their delicate constitutions, sexual purity and moral superiority to men and black women were subhuman creatures who, by nature, were strong and sexual (pp.10-11).

Racial animosity simmered until the 1880's when the South was returned to Southern leadership. Cultural contacts were violent and exploitative. Social etiquette called for a return to the antebellum system of relations (Mandle, 1978). Schools became the new authoritative institution to teach prevailing social norms. Because whites convinced themselves that blacks were intellectually inferior, seperate but unequal schools were funded. The miseducation of black and white youngsters became generational. During this time laws were also passed which completely disfranchised blacks politically, economically and socially (Berghe, 1967) For the next eighty-five years the old South reigned.

Old South v. New South

Two major laws that were enacted which eventually gave birth

to the New South and changed Southern culture were: the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Each of these laws made it possible for blacks to re-enter mainstream society. These significant pieces of legislation empowered blacks which changed past social patterns. The Lost Cause became largely symbolic. Southern white leaders, partiularly in large urban areas, became accepting of a new social order, albeit reluctantly. Southern reformers, black and white, began to promote change to improve their respective social and economic opportunities. Thus the New South came to be a place marketed as rich in history, economically advantageous for industrial/ technological growth, and free of racial turmoil which characterzied the past. Though an appealing concept, the question remains is the New South really different from the Old South?

The New South is fundamentally different from the Old South in that there is a redistribution of economic and political resources. Educationally, the South leads the country in school desegregation (King, 1979). Nonetheless the legacy of the past can be observed upon closer inspections of recent educational, political and economic gains of blacks.

Though the South leads the country in desegregated schools, there still remains serious problems. King(1979) reported the hiring of fewer minority teachers has not kept pace with black enrollments. "In the South, where 34 percent of the elementary and secondary school children are black, only 24 percent of the teachers are (p.A16)." The continued underfunding of schools

attended by blacks is problematic. In seven states, blacks represent more than 20 percent of the population (Mississippi (35%), South Carolina (34%), Louisiana (29%), Georgia (27%), Alabama (26%), Maryland (23%) and North Carolina (22%). Garibaldi(1986) concluded:

> All of these states have more than 30 percent minority students in their respective school systems and only one (Maryland) has a per pupil expenditure ranked above 30, placing them amoung the lowest state in per pupil expenditure when compared with the 50 states and the District of Columbia(p.10).

Recently Judge Neal Biggers, a President Reagan appointee, dismissed a lawsuit that charged Mississippi with illegally operating a racially segregated higher-education system (Jaschik, 1988): Judge Biggers ruled,

> ...the groups that filed the suit had been able to prove that black and white students enrolled in colleges at different rates and that historically black and histroically white colleges received disparate amounts of state support. But he said such evidence alone did not prove illegal or unconstitutional discrimination (pA22).

Black economic gains in the South are significantly improved since 1970 according to Karning and McClain (1985). They pointed out that as economic conditions increased in the South, skilled and better educated blacks moved to the South. "Between 1975 and 1980, nearly one-half million blacks moved South (p.540)." However, the findings, a t-test analysis concluded that gains achieved by southern blacks were less substantial than in other regions. For example,

> the median black income in southern cities is 11,094, whereas it is 14,584 in nonsouthern cities ... In 1980, black median income in southern cities was only 55.8 percent of white median income... In nonsouthern cities, the ratio was 70.9 perent (pp.544-545).

Black southerners have achieved the most politically. According to the Joint Center for Political Studies (Cohen, 1988) the number of black elected officials increased from 1,469 in 1970 to 6,681 in 1987, in that same time, the number of mayors rose from 48 to 303; Congressional members rose from 10 to 23; statewide office holders rose from one to five; State senators rose from 137 to 311; and 64.5 percent of black elected officials are in the South, where 52.8 percent of American's black population lives. Though these data speak volumes for black achievement, there is some reasons for caution. Moore(1981) posited that due to major fiscal problems black politicans must not only find substitutes for strong local power bases, but also, they usually lack strong bases with local white-controlled corporate powers. The black political elite is too financially dependent on white elite support for any radical restructuring of goverance.

School Curriculum

Southern schools like other schools in the country are dependent on published materials to teach their classes. Curriculum therefore is largely limited to standandized, grade level specific text(Apple, 1988). According to Apple, "75 percent of the time elementary and secondary students are in classrooms and 90 percent of the time they assign to homework is

spent with text materials (p.225)." A careful examination of what is taught in three southern states, (Louisiana, Mississippi and Virgina) sheds light on how southern culture permeates the curriculum.

Since history is a subject used by states to teach their past, reviewing history text reveal popular interpretations. Fleming(1987) studied how slavery is treated in high school textbooks approved by the state of Virginia. He concluded that variations were considerable, both in the amount of coverage and in specific details. "Of the fourteen books reviewed only three gave little attention to slave life and none gave slave life any form of favorable treatment (p.556)." However Fleming did point out that copies of earlier books can be found in schools as required texts. These earlier books described slavery as an enjoyable experience for blacks. "Generally speaking, the slave's food was plentiful, his clothing adequate, his cabin warm, his health protected, his leisure carefree... slaves enjoyed collective social security" (Hamphill, et.al., 1957, p.120).

Robert Moore(1980) judged the only required history text used in Mississippi schools to be too distored, biased, and full of omissions(p.3). John Bettersworth's text Your Mississippi minimized the brutality of slavery limiting the treatment of slaves to four paragraphs. The author makes no mention of segregation or lynching. Though other textbooks can be found in Mississippi, Bettersworth's book is still popular reading.

In Louisiana, two history books are placed in most schools -

Louisiana: The Land and Its People and Our Louisiana Legacy. Both textbooks treat the past in ways that celebrated the Lost Cause. For example, Sue and Culbertson's Louisiana: The Land and Its People described relationships on the plantation as happy. "Natural ties of affection developed among many of these people who were dependent upon one another as owners and slaves (p.272)." The authors further stated that most slaves enjoyed regular rest days and vacations (p.275). In Dethloff and Begnaud's Our Louisiana Legacy slaves were "sufficiently fed, clothed and housed... ....Although the treatment of slaves may not have been overly harsh, the fact that one was not free must have been a terrible burden (p.205)."

These writers conveniently avoided the horrors of slavery to appease the white southerners' sensibility and to make a buck. On one hand in not addressing the social, political, educational and economic ramifications of slavery and segregation de jure, southern writers have by omission heightened racial tensions and misunderstandings. Blacks resent the mollification of their history and experiences and perceive southern nostalgia as overt racism. Concomitantly, whites choose to recall selective aspects of southern history in order to avoid a reconciliation of their tumultuous and tragic past. Consequentially, the null curriculum condemns whites to provincial attitudes and outlooks consistent with racial hegemony. On the other hand, books that are not profitable are not viewed favorably by publishers(Apple, 1988). Thus southern culture as the Lost Cause continues to be manufactered due to the financial power of the southern white elite. In

this way the overt curriculum and null curriculum perpetuate southern mythology.

Conclusion

We have seen how the struggles between blacks and whites in the southern states gave meaning to southern culture. Today scholars of the American South are redefining Southern culture to incorporate the experiences of blacks and members of ethnic groups (Winkler, 1988). No longer in learned communities is Southern culture considered only white. "Because black people have played such a significant role in Southern history, the redefinition of Southern culture focuses particularly on reclaiming their experience (p.A9)."

The New South's glory days are gone (Katz,1988). From the early 70's to the mid-1980's, the era brought prosperity to much of the region, however industry has begun relocation to Third World countries (p.C-2). Presently, the future of the New South is uncertain. Nonetheless, southern leaders view an improved educational system as a step in the right direction.

For significant social change to occur, black and white students need a new curriculum. A curriculum free of distortions, myths and legends. These students should be challanged to face the future for "those whose pride in past and present renders them identical with what they have been conditioned to be, and thus profoundly ignorant of what they might strive to become (Pinar, 1988, p.273)."

As a black male who witnessed the Old South give way to the New South, I can attest to these lived experiences. What the

future holds is very much in doubt. More research is needed to investigate how culture can mitigate learning or serve as a vehicle for liberation. Today southern blacks and whites engage in more interracial activities than ever before and yet in profound ways we remain strangers to one another.

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